

# A Lover's Complaint



From off a hill whose concave womb reworded  
A plaintful story from a sist'ring vale,  
My spirits t'attend this double voice accorded,  
And down I laid to list the sad-tuned tale;  
Ere long espied a fickle maid full pale,  
Tearing of papers, breaking rings a-twain,  
Storming her world with sorrow's wind and rain.

Upon her head a platted hive of straw,  
Which fortified her visage from the sun,  
Whereon the thought might think sometimes it saw  
The carcass of a beauty spent and done.  
Time had not scythèd all that youth begun,  
Nor youth all quit, but spite of heaven's fell rage  
Some beauty peeped through lattice of seared age.

Oft did she heave her napkin to her eyne,  
Which on it had conceited characters,  
Laund'ring the silken figures in the brine  
That seasoned woe had pelleted in tears,  
And often reading what contents it bears;  
As often shrieking undistinguished woe,  
In clamors of all size, both high and low.

Sometimes her leveled eyes their carriage ride,  
As they did batt'ry to the spheres intend;  
Sometimes diverted, their poor balls are tied  
To th'orbèd earth; sometimes they do extend

1 Their view right on; anon their gazes lend 26  
2 To every place at once, and, nowhere fixed, 27  
3 The mind and sight distractedly commixed. 28  
4

5 Her hair, nor loose nor tied in formal plat, 29  
6 Proclaimed in her a careless hand of pride; 30  
For some, untucked, descended her sheaved hat, 31  
Hanging her pale and pinèd cheek beside; 32  
8 Some in her threaden fillet still did bide, 33  
9 And, true to bondage, would not break from thence,  
10 Though slackly braided in loose negligence.

11  
12 A thousand favors from a maund she drew 36  
13 Of amber, crystal, and of beaded jet, 37  
14 Which one by one she in a river threw,  
Upon whose weeping margent she was set, 39  
15 Like usury applying wet to wet, 40  
16 Or monarch's hands that lets not bounty fall 41  
Where want cries some, but where excess begs all. 42

18  
20 Of folded schedules had she many a one, 43  
Which she perused, sighed, tore, and gave the flood; 44  
Cracked many a ring of posied gold and bone, 45  
Bidding them find their sepulchers in mud;  
22 Found yet more letters sadly penned in blood,  
23 With sleided silk feat and affectedly 48  
24 Enswathed and sealed to curious secrecy. 49  
25

1 **concave womb** hollow-shaped hillside. **reworded** echoed  
2 **plaintful story** i.e., mournful sound (which turns out to be the grieving of a maiden). **sist'ring** neighboring 3 **t'attend** to listen to.  
**double** (because echoed). **accorded** inclined, consented 4 **list** listen to. **sad-tuned** i.e., sung in a minor key 5 **fickle** i.e., perturbed, moody 6 **papers** i.e., love letters 8 **platted hive** i.e., woven hat  
9 **fortified** protected 10 **the thought** the mind, the imagination  
11 **carcass** decaying, lifeless remnant. **spent** consumed 12–13 **all . . . quit** all the beauty of her youth, nor had youth abandoned her entirely  
13 **fell** deadly, cruel 14 **seared** dried up 15 **heave** lift. **napkin** handkerchief. **eyne** eyes 16 **conceited characters** fanciful or emblematic devices 18 **seasoned** (1) matured (2) salted. **pelleted** formed into small globules 20 **undistinguished woe** incoherent cries of grief 22 **her . . . ride** i.e., her eyes, directed and aimed like a cannon, swiveled about as on a gun carriage 23 **As . . . intend** as if they did intend to direct their fire against the heavens 24 **balls** eyeballs  
24–5 **are . . . earth** seem fixed to the orb-shaped earth, to the ground

26 **right on** straight in front of her 26–7 **lend . . . once** i.e., roll distractedly everywhere 28 **The mind . . . commixed** her mind and sight wildly confused or mingled. 29 **nor . . . nor** neither . . . nor.  
**in formal plat** neatly braided 30 **careless . . . pride** hand careless of appearances 31 **descended** hung from. **sheaved** straw 32 **Hang- ing . . . beside** hanging beside her pale cheek wasted with pining  
33 **threaden fillet** i.e., ribbon binding her hair 36 **favors** love tokens. **maund** woven basket with handles 37 **beaded jet** jet beads  
39 **weeping margent** moist bank. (Though *weeping* also applies to her.) 40 **usury** i.e., adding money to money; she adds tears to the river's water 41–2 **Or . . . all** or like the monarch who distributes his bounty not among those whose need cries out for some aid, but among the excessively wealthy who beg for absolutely everything.  
43 **schedules** papers containing writing, i.e., letters 44 **gave the flood** threw in the stream 45 **posied** inscribed with a motto  
48 **sleided** separated into threads. **feat** featly, adroitly. **affectedly** lovingly 49 **Enswathed . . . secrecy** wrapped about (with the silk) and sealed (with wax) into careful secrecy.



These often bathed she in her fluxive eyes,  
And often kissed, and often 'gan to tear;  
Cried, "O false blood, thou register of lies,  
What unapproved witness dost thou bear!  
Ink would have seemed more black and damnèd here!"  
This said, in top of rage the lines she rents,  
Big discontent so breaking their contents.

A reverend man that grazed his cattle nigh—  
Sometime a blusterer, that the ruffle knew  
Of court, of city, and had let go by  
The swiftest hours, observèd as they flew—  
Towards this afflicted fancy fastly drew,  
And, privileged by age, desires to know  
In brief the grounds and motives of her woe.

So slides he down upon his grained bat,  
And comely-distant sits he by her side,  
When he again desires her, being sat,  
Her grievance with his hearing to divide.  
If that from him there may be aught applied  
Which may her suffering ecstasy assuage,  
'Tis promised in the charity of age.

"Father," she says, "though in me you behold  
The injury of many a blasting hour,  
Let it not tell your judgment I am old;  
Not age, but sorrow, over me hath power.  
I might as yet have been a spreading flower,  
Fresh to myself, if I had self-applied  
Love to myself and to no love beside.

"But, woe is me! Too early I attended  
A youthful suit—it was to gain my grace—  
Oh, one by nature's outwards so commended  
That maidens' eyes stuck over all his face.  
Love lacked a dwelling and made him her place;  
And when in his fair parts she did abide,  
She was new lodged and newly deified.

"His brown locks did hang in crooked curls,  
And every light occasion of the wind

50 **fluxive** flowing 52 **blood** i.e., the blood in which the letters were written (line 47), but with a sense also of the *blood* or passion that has played her false. **register** record 53 **unapproved** unconfirmed, false 55 **in top of** in the height of. **rents** rends, tears 56 **discontent** . . . contents (With a play of antithesis.) 57 **reverend** aged 58 **Sometime** at one time. **blusterer** swaggerer. **ruffle** commotion, bustle 60 **swiftest hours** i.e., time of youth. **observèd as they flew** (This man has let his youth go by and disappear, but not without observing and learning from the years as they flew.) 61 **fancy** i.e., amorous passion and the person expressing it. **fastly** (1) quickly (2) in close proximity 64 **So . . . bat** And so he lowers himself by means of his club or staff that is worn and showing the grain 65 **comely-distant** at a decorous distance 66 **being** he being 67 **divide** share. 68 **If that** If 69 **ecstasy** frenzy (of grief) 70 **in the charity of age** in the loving-kindness that old people can offer. 71 **Father** i.e., Old man 72 **blasting** blighting, withering 75 **spreading** unfolding 76 **Fresh to myself** i.e., like a flower that lives and dies unseen and unplucked 78 **attended** heeded 79 **grace** favor 80 **nature's outwards** the physical appearance given him by nature 81 **stuck over** i.e., were glued to 82 **Love** Venus 84 **She . . . deified** Love, already a goddess, was made doubly so when she dwelt with him. 86 **occasion** chance breath

50 Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls. 87  
What's sweet to do, to do will aptly find; 88  
52 Each eye that saw him did enchant the mind,  
53 For on his visage was in little drawn 90  
What largeness thinks in Paradise was sawn. 91

55  
56 "Small show of man was yet upon his chin;  
His phoenix down began but to appear 93  
57 Like unshorn velvet on that termless skin 94  
58 Whose bare outbragged the web it seemed to wear. 95  
Yet showed his visage by that cost more dear; 96  
60 And nice affections wavering stood in doubt 97  
61 If best were as it was, or best without. 98

"His qualities were beauteous as his form,  
For maiden-tongued he was, and thereof free; 99  
64 Yet, if men moved him, was he such a storm 100  
65 As oft twixt May and April is to see, 102  
66 When winds breathe sweet, unruly though they be.  
67 His rudeness so with his authorized youth 104  
68 Did livery falseness in a pride of truth. 105  
69

70 "Well could he ride, and often men would say,  
'That horse his mettle from his rider takes. 107  
71 Proud of subjection, noble by the sway, 108  
72 What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stop he  
makes!' 109  
And controversy hence a question takes, 110  
75 Whether the horse by him became his deed, 111  
76 Or he his manage by th' well-doing steed. 112

"But quickly on this side the verdict went:  
78 His real habitude gave life and grace 114  
79 To appertainings and to ornament, 115  
80 Accomplished in himself, not in his case. 116  
81 All aids, themselves made fairer by their place, 117  
82

84  
87 **Upon . . . hurls** (the wind) tosses the *silken parcels*, the curls, against his lips. 88 **to do will aptly find** i.e., will find a doer or an occasion 90 **in little** in miniature 91 **What . . . sawn** what one supposes was seen in full scale in Paradise. 93 **phoenix** i.e., suggesting his unique perfection (since only one phoenix, a mythical bird, exists at one time) 94 **Like . . . skin** like velvet with its nap not yet trimmed or shaved, on that skin which words are inadequate to describe 95 **Whose . . . wear** the unadorned surface of which could outboast in handsomeness the downy covering it seemed to wear. 96 **Yet . . . dear** Yet his face seemed all the lovelier for its rich covering 97 **nice affections** carefully discriminating tastes 98 **without** i.e., lacking the downy beard. 99 **qualities were** manner was as 100 **maiden-tongued** modest of speech, soft-spoken. **free** eloquent, well-spoken 101 **moved** i.e., to anger 102 **to see** to be seen 104–5 **His . . . truth** His roughness, privileged by his youth, thereby did dress falseness in a magnificent garment or concealment of truth. 107 **mettle** vigor and strength of spirit 108 **noble by the sway** made noble by the way he's controlled 109 **stop** sudden check in a horse's "career" or trial gallop at full speed. (All the terms here are terms of *manage*, line 112, the schooling or handling of a horse.) 110 **takes** takes up, considers 111–12 **Whether . . . steed** whether it was owing to his horsemanship that his horse acted so becomingly or whether he seemed such a good rider because he had so good a horse. 114 **habitude** constitution, temperament 115 **appertainings** external attributes 116 **case** appearance and circumstances, e.g., the possession of so good a horse. 117 **place** i.e., place near to him or on his person



Came for additions, yet their purposed trim  
Pieced not his grace, but were all graced by him.

"So on the tip of his subduing tongue  
All kind of arguments and question deep,  
All replication prompt and reason strong,  
For his advantage still did wake and sleep.  
To make the weeper laugh, the laughter weep,  
He had the dialect and different skill,  
Catching all passions in his craft of will,

"That he did in the general bosom reign  
Of young, of old, and sexes both enchanted,  
To dwell with him in thoughts, or to remain  
In personal duty, following where he haunted.  
Consents bewitched, ere he desire, have granted,  
And dialogued for him what he would say,  
Asked their own wills, and made their wills obey.

"Many there were that did his picture get  
To serve their eyes, and in it put their mind,  
Like fools that in th'imagination set  
The goodly objects which abroad they find  
Of lands and mansions, theirs in thought assigned,  
And laboring in more pleasures to bestow them  
Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them;

"So many have, that never touched his hand,  
Sweetly supposed them mistress of his heart.  
My woeful self, that did in freedom stand,  
And was my own fee simple, not in part,  
What with his art in youth, and youth in art,  
Threw my affections in his charmed power,  
Reserved the stalk and gave him all my flower.

"Yet did I not, as some my equals did,  
Demand of him, nor being desired yielded;  
Finding myself in honor so forbid,

118–19 **Came** . . . **him** added to his attractiveness, yet their intended function as ornament did not so much augment his grace as take grace from him. 122–3 **All** . . . **sleep** all prompt riposte and persuasive argument served him at all hours, like servants always ready whenever called. 125 **dialect** manner of expression. **different** varied, readily adaptable 126 **passions** (1) passions of his hearers (2) passions incorporated into his moving speech. **craft of will** skill in persuasion 127 **That** so that. **general bosom** hearts of all 130 **In personal duty** i.e., like a personal servant. **haunted** frequented. 131–3 **Consents** . . . **obey** i.e., Women have consented to his will before he even asked them, have made up his love speeches to them for him, and have made themselves obey as if obeying their own desires. 135 **in it** . . . **mind** let their minds become engrossed with it 136–40 **Like** . . . **owe them** like fools who imagine certain goodly lands and mansions they have happened on in their travels to be their own, and try harder to make them habitable and pleasurable than does the gout-afflicted landlord who owns them 141 **So many** Thus many women 142 **them** themselves 144 **was** . . . **part** i.e., had total control of my own destiny, as of land held in perpetuity, not partial control 146 **charmèd power** power to charm or cast a spell 148 **my equals** i.e., of those equal to me in age and station 149 **Demand** . . . **yielded** i.e., ask him to take me, or, yield myself to him the moment he desired me to 150 **in honor so forbid** forbidden by (maidenly) honor to do so (i.e., to yield at once)

118 With safest distance I mine honor shielded. 151  
119 Experience for me many bulwarks builded 152  
Of proofs new-bleeding, which remained the foil 153  
Of this false jewel and his amorous spoil. 154

122 "But, ah, who ever shunned by precedent  
123 The destined ill she must herself assay? 156  
Or forced examples, 'gainst her own content 157  
125 To put the by-past perils in her way? 158  
126 Counsel may stop awhile what will not stay; 159  
For when we rage, advice is often seen 160  
127 By blunting us to make our wits more keen. 161

"Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood 162  
130 That we must curb it upon others' proof, 163  
131 To be forbade the sweets that seems so good 164  
132 For fear of harms that preach in our behoof. 165  
133 O appetite, from judgment stand aloof! 166  
The one a palate hath that needs will taste, 167  
Though Reason weep and cry, 'It is thy last.'

135 "For further I could say 'This man's untrue,' 169  
136 And knew the patterns of his foul beguiling; 170  
137 Heard where his plants in others' orchards grew, 171  
138 Saw how deceits were gilded in his smiling; 172  
139 Knew vows were ever brokers to defiling; 173  
140 Thought characters and words merely but art, 174  
And bastards of his foul adulterate heart.

"And long upon these terms I held my city, 176  
144 Till thus he 'gan besiege me: 'Gentle maid,  
Have of my suffering youth some feeling pity,  
146 And be not of my holy vows afraid.  
That's to ye sworn to none was ever said; 180  
For feasts of love I have been called unto, 181  
Till now did ne'er invite, nor never woo. 182

150 " 'All my offenses that abroad you see 183  
Are errors of the blood, none of the mind.

151 **With safest distance** by staying at a safe distance 152–3 **Experi-**  
**ence** . . . **new-bleeding** i.e., The experience of those recently undone  
in love by him provided me with many defenses 153 **foil** dark back-  
ground used to show off the brilliance of a jewel 154 **this false**  
**jewel** i.e., the young man. **spoil** plunder; that which is spoiled.  
156 **assay** learn by experience. 157–8 **Or** . . . **way?** Or, in order to  
deter her own present inclination, urged the dangers experienced by  
others in the past? 159 **stay** stop forever 160 **rage** i.e., in passion  
161 **By** . . . **keen** in attempting to stop us, merely making us all the  
more ingenious and eager. 162 **blood** passion 163 **proof** experi-  
ence 164 **seems** seem 165 **preach in our behoof** offer us good  
advice aimed at benefiting us. 166 **O appetite** . . . **aloof!** O desire,  
you will always remain distant from judgment! 167 **The one** i.e.,  
Passion, *appetite*. **needs will taste** insists upon gratification  
169 **say** . . . **untrue** tell of this man's faithlessness 170 **knew** . . .  
**beguiling** had examples of his treachery before me 171 **plants** i.e.,  
children illegitimately begotten. **orchards** i.e., wombs 172 **gilded**  
given a gilded (false) surface 173 **brokers** panders 174 **characters**  
**and words** i.e., the written and spoken word. **art** artifice 176 **city**  
citadel (of chastity) 180 **That's** That which is 181–2 **For** . . . **woo** I  
have been invited to other feasts of love before now, but never until  
now did I do the inviting and the wooing. 183 **abroad** in the world  
around us



Love made them not. With acture they may be,  
Where neither party is nor true nor kind.  
They sought their shame that so their shame did find;  
And so much less of shame in me remains  
By how much of me their reproach contains.

" 'Among the many that mine eyes have seen,  
Not one whose flame my heart so much as warmed,  
Or my affection put to th' smallest teen,  
Or any of my leisures ever charmed.  
Harm have I done to them, but ne'er was harmed;  
Kept hearts in liveries, but mine own was free,  
And reigned, commanding in his monarchy.

" 'Look here what tributes wounded fancies sent me,  
Of pallid pearls and rubies red as blood,  
Figuring that they their passions likewise lent me  
Of grief and blushes, aptly understood  
In bloodless white and the encrimsoned mood—  
Effects of terror and dear modesty,  
Encamped in hearts but fighting outwardly.

" 'And, lo, behold these talents of their hair,  
With twisted metal amorously impleached,  
I have received from many a several fair,  
Their kind acceptance weepingly beseeched,  
With th'annexions of fair gems enriched,  
And deep-brained sonnets that did amplify  
Each stone's dear nature, worth, and quality.

" 'The diamond? Why, 'twas beautiful and hard,  
Whereto his invised properties did tend;  
The deep-green emerald, in whose fresh regard  
Weak sights their sickly radiance do amend;  
The heaven-hued sapphire and the opal blend  
With objects manifold—each several stone,  
With wit well blazoned, smiled or made some moan.

185–6 With . . . kind They may be physically performed where nei-  
ther partner is faithful or truly in love. 188–9 And . . . contains and I  
am all the less to blame by how little their reproaches really accuse me  
(rather than themselves). 191 Not one . . . warmed i.e., there is not one  
whose flame of passion so much as warmed my heart 192 Or . . . teen  
or gave my affection the least sorrow (*teen*) 193 Or . . . charmed or put  
a spell on any of my times of leisure. 195 in liveries in the uniform of  
a person in service, i.e., almost enslaved 197 wounded fancies i.e.,  
doting young women 199 Figuring signifying 201 mood mode,  
form, emotional state (i.e., blushing) 202 Effects the signs or results.  
dear precious; deeply felt 203 Encamped . . . outwardly (White and  
red contend visually in the alternation of pallor and blushing  
cheeks, while fear and maidenly shame occupy the hearts of the  
women who have been seduced.) 204 talents i.e., treasures, riches  
205 impleached intertwined 206 a several fair different beautiful  
young women 208 th'annexions the additions 209 deep-brained  
intricate. amplify enlarge upon, go into detail about 212 Whereto . . .  
tend toward which its invisible properties incline. (*Invised*, used nowhere  
else, may be an error for *incised*, "engraved.") The young man, too, is  
beautiful and hard. 213 regard aspect, sight 214 radiance power of  
vision. (The emerald helps repair weak vision in those who look at it,  
just as the young man refreshes the eyes by his beauty.) 215–16 blend  
. . . manifold blended of many colors (?), or, blended with (or that  
blends with) many objects presented to the sight (?) 216 several partic-  
ular 217 blazoned proclaimed, cataloged (in the accompanying son-  
nets). smiled . . . moan symbolized joy or grief in love.

185 " 'Lo, all these trophies of affections hot, 218  
186 Of pensived and subdued desires the tender, 219  
Nature hath charged me that I hoard them not,  
188 But yield them up where I myself must render,  
189 That is, to you, my origin and ender; 222  
For these, of force, must your oblations be, 223  
Since, I their altar, you enpatron me. 224

192 " 'Oh, then, advance of yours that phraseless hand, 225  
193 Whose white weighs down the airy scale of praise! 226  
Take all these similes to your own command, 227  
195 Hallowed with sighs that burning lungs did raise; 228  
What me, your minister for you, obeys, 229  
Works under you; and to your audit comes 230  
197 Their distract parcels in combinèd sums. 231

199 " 'Lo, this device was sent me from a nun, 233  
Or sister sanctified of holiest note, 234  
201 Which late her noble suit in court did shun, 235  
202 Whose rarest havings made the blossoms dote; 236  
203 For she was sought by spirits of richest coat, 237  
But kept cold distance, and did thence remove 238  
204 To spend her living in eternal love. 239

206 " 'But oh, my sweet, what labor is't to leave 239  
The thing we have not, mast'ring what not strives, 240  
208 Paling the place which did no form receive, 241  
209 Playing patient sports in unconstrained gyves? 242  
She that her fame so to herself contrives 243  
The scars of battle scapeth by the flight, 244  
And makes her absence valiant, not her might. 245

213 " 'Oh, pardon me, in that my boast is true! 246  
214 The accident which brought me to her eye 247  
215 Upon the moment did her force subdue, 248  
216  
217

218 affections passions 219 pensived saddened. tender offering  
222 ender end, conclusion. (You are the source of my life and that  
without which I cannot live.) 223 of force perforce. your oblations  
offerings made at the altar of love for you 224 Since . . . me since I  
am the altar (on which these gifts are offered) and you are my patron  
saint (to whom the altar is dedicated). 225 phraseless indescribable  
226 weighs . . . praise outweighs in the scales any praise that can be  
offered to it in airy words. 227 similes i.e., symbolic love tokens or  
gems accompanied by symbolic explanation in the sonnets 228 Hal-  
lowed consecrated. burning i.e., hot with passion 229–30 What . . .  
you whatever is at the command of me, your minister or agent acting  
on your authority, is thus yours also 230 audit account 231 dis-  
tract parcels component parts 233 note reputation 234 Which . . .  
shun who recently (before she became nun) shunned those who sued  
for her attention at court 235 Whose . . . dote whose rare gift of  
beauty made the young courtiers (in the blossom of their life) dote on  
her 236 spirits spirited young men. coat coat of arms, i.e., descent  
237 remove depart 238 living lifetime. eternal love love of the  
eternal God (i.e., she became a nun). 239–42 what . . . gyves? how  
can it be called a difficult thing to give up something we haven't tried  
yet, mastering an emotion that offers no resistance, paling or fencing in  
the heart upon which no lover has yet made any impression, patiently  
pretending to endure restraints that, in fact, impose no restraint and  
that one is not obliged to endure? 243 her fame . . . contrives  
devises for herself a reputation (for renouncing love) 245 makes . . .  
might i.e., shows valor only in avoiding temptation, not in con-  
fronting it directly. 246 my boast i.e., that she could resist me only  
by fleeing, not when she saw me 248 Upon the moment at once



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blends with) many objects presented to the sight (?) 216 several partic-  
ular 217 blazoned proclaimed, cataloged (in the accompanying son-  
nets). smiled . . . moan symbolized joy or grief in love.

185 " 'Lo, all these trophies of affections hot, 218  
186 Of pensived and subdued desires the tender, 219  
Nature hath charged me that I hoard them not,  
188 But yield them up where I myself must render,  
189 That is, to you, my origin and ender; 222  
For these, of force, must your oblations be, 223  
Since, I their altar, you enpatron me. 224

192 " 'Oh, then, advance of yours that phraseless hand, 225  
193 Whose white weighs down the airy scale of praise! 226  
Take all these similes to your own command, 227  
195 Hallowed with sighs that burning lungs did raise; 228  
What me, your minister for you, obeys, 229  
Works under you; and to your audit comes 230  
197 Their distract parcels in combinèd sums. 231

199 " 'Lo, this device was sent me from a nun, 233  
Or sister sanctified of holiest note, 234  
201 Which late her noble suit in court did shun, 235  
202 Whose rarest havings made the blossoms dote; 236  
203 For she was sought by spirits of richest coat, 237  
But kept cold distance, and did thence remove 238  
204 To spend her living in eternal love. 239

206 " 'But oh, my sweet, what labor is't to leave 239  
The thing we have not, mast'ring what not strives, 240  
208 Paling the place which did no form receive, 241  
209 Playing patient sports in unconstrained gyves? 242  
She that her fame so to herself contrives 243  
The scars of battle scapeth by the flight, 244  
And makes her absence valiant, not her might. 245

213 " 'Oh, pardon me, in that my boast is true! 246  
214 The accident which brought me to her eye 247  
215 Upon the moment did her force subdue, 248  
216  
217

218 affections passions 219 pensived saddened. tender offering  
222 ender end, conclusion. (You are the source of my life and that  
without which I cannot live.) 223 of force perforce. your oblations  
offerings made at the altar of love for you 224 Since . . . me since I  
am the altar (on which these gifts are offered) and you are my patron  
saint (to whom the altar is dedicated). 225 phraseless indescribable  
226 weighs . . . praise outweighs in the scales any praise that can be  
offered to it in airy words. 227 similes i.e., symbolic love tokens or  
gems accompanied by symbolic explanation in the sonnets 228 Hal-  
lowed consecrated. burning i.e., hot with passion 229–30 What . . .  
you whatever is at the command of me, your minister or agent acting  
on your authority, is thus yours also 230 audit account 231 dis-  
tract parcels component parts 233 note reputation 234 Which . . .  
shun who recently (before she became nun) shunned those who sued  
for her attention at court 235 Whose . . . dote whose rare gift of  
beauty made the young courtiers (in the blossom of their life) dote on  
her 236 spirits spirited young men. coat coat of arms, i.e., descent  
237 remove depart 238 living lifetime. eternal love love of the  
eternal God (i.e., she became a nun). 239–42 what . . . gyves? how  
can it be called a difficult thing to give up something we haven't tried  
yet, mastering an emotion that offers no resistance, paling or fencing in  
the heart upon which no lover has yet made any impression, patiently  
pretending to endure restraints that, in fact, impose no restraint and  
that one is not obliged to endure? 243 her fame . . . contrives  
devises for herself a reputation (for renouncing love) 245 makes . . .  
might i.e., shows valor only in avoiding temptation, not in con-  
fronting it directly. 246 my boast i.e., that she could resist me only  
by fleeing, not when she saw me 248 Upon the moment at once



And now she would the caged cloister fly.  
 Religious love put out religion's eye.  
 Not to be tempted, would she be immured,  
 And now to tempt all liberty procured.

" 'How mighty then you are, oh, hear me tell!  
 The broken bosoms that to me belong  
 Have emptied all their fountains in my well,  
 And mine I pour your ocean all among.  
 I strong o'er them, and you o'er me being strong,  
 Must for your victory us all congest,  
 As compound love to physic your cold breast.

" 'My parts had power to charm a sacred nun,  
 Who, disciplined, ay, dieted in grace,  
 Believed her eyes when they t'assail begun,  
 All vows and consecrations giving place.  
 O most potential love! Vow, bond, nor space,  
 In thee hath neither sting, knot, nor confine,  
 For thou art all, and all things else are thine.

" 'When thou impresses, what are precepts worth  
 Of stale example? When thou wilt inflame,  
 How coldly those impediments stand forth  
 Of wealth, of filial fear, law, kindred, fame!  
 Love's arms are peace, 'gainst rule, 'gainst sense, 'gainst  
 shame,  
 And sweetens, in the suff'ring pangs it bears,  
 The aloes of all forces, shocks, and fears.

" 'Now all these hearts that do on mine depend,  
 Feeling it break, with bleeding groans they pine,  
 And suppliant their sighs to you extend  
 To leave the batt'ry that you make 'gainst mine,

249 she would . . . fly she wished to flee the locked convent.  
 250 Religious . . . eye i.e., Love of me put out love of the divine.  
 251-2 Not . . . procured Before she wished to be shut up from tempta-  
 tion, but now she sought liberty to venture everything. (The Quarto  
 reads "enur'd" for "immured" and perhaps should be "inured,"  
 habituated.) 254 bosoms hearts 255-6 Have . . . among have emp-  
 tied all their affections into me as into a spring, and I in turn, like a  
 river, pour all these fountains of affection into your ocean.  
 257 strong victorious 258-9 Must . . . breast must as a consequence  
 of your victory gather together all of us (my admirers and myself) as  
 a compound of various ingredients applied as a medicine to cure and  
 thaw your resisting heart. 260 parts qualities 261 dieted in sus-  
 tained by 262 they t'assail begun they (my qualities or parts) began  
 to assail her heart 264 potential powerful 264-5 Vow . . . confine  
 Against you vows have no strength (*sting*), bonds have no binding  
 force (*knot*), and space is no barrier or impediment (*confine*)  
 267 thou impresses you make an impression on a heart or conscript  
 it into your service 267-8 what . . . example? of what worth are  
 moralistic warnings based on stale old instances? 271 Love's . . .  
 shame Love's might enforces its own peace in the teeth of reason,  
 good sense, and decorum 272 pangs it bears pangs that it (love)  
 brings, the pangs that lovers must suffer 273 aloes bitter drugs,  
 medicines 275 break i.e., break in disappointment at the threat of  
 your rejecting me. bleeding groans (Each groan was thought to cost  
 the heart a drop of blood.) 276 suppliant as supplicants 277 leave  
 leave off. mine my heart

249 Lending soft audience to my sweet design, 278  
 250 And credent soul to that strong-bonded oath 279  
 251 That shall prefer and undertake my troth.' 280  
 252

"This said, his wat'ry eyes he did dismount, 281  
 Whose sights till then were leveled on my face; 282  
 254 Each cheek a river running from a fount  
 255 With brinish current downward flowed apace.  
 256 Oh, how the channel to the stream gave grace! 285  
 257 Who glazed with crystal gate the glowing roses 286  
 258 That flame through water which their hue encloses. 287  
 259

"Oh, father, what a hell of witchcraft lies 288  
 In the small orb of one particular tear! 289  
 260 But with the inundation of the eyes  
 261 What rocky heart to water will not wear?  
 262 What breast so cold that is not warmed here?  
 264 Oh, cleft effect! Cold modesty, hot wrath, 293  
 265 Both fire from hence and chill extincture hath. 294

"For, lo, his passion, but an art of craft, 295  
 Even there resolved my reason into tears; 296  
 268 There my white stole of chastity I daffed, 297  
 Shook off my sober guards and civil fears; 298  
 Appear to him as he to me appears, 299  
 All melting, though our drops this difference bore: 300  
 His poisoned me, and mine did him restore.

"In him a plenitude of subtle matter, 302  
 Applied to cautels, all strange forms receives, 303  
 Of burning blushes, or of weeping water,  
 275 Or swooning paleness; and he takes and leaves, 305  
 276 In either's aptness, as it best deceives, 306  
 277 To blush at speeches rank, to weep at woes, 307  
 Or to turn white and swoon at tragic shows;

"That not a heart which in his level came 309  
 Could scape the hail of his all-hurting aim, 310  
 Showing fair nature is both kind and tame; 311

278-80 Lending . . . troth lending their support to my suit to you and  
 credibility to the inviolable oath that thereby guarantees the truth of  
 what I say. 281 dismount lower (as in dismounting an artillery  
 piece) 282 leveled on aimed at 285 channel . . . stream cheek to  
 the flow of tears 286-7 Who . . . encloses i.e., which river of tears  
 glazed over the cheeks (the roses) with a kind of crystal covering, in  
 such a way that the cheeks' rosy color shines through the water.  
 288 father i.e., the old man to whom she is talking 289 particular  
 single 293 cleft twofold. 293-4 Cold . . . hath Cold modesty  
 receives warmth and hot desire is cooled by such tears. 295 passion  
 passionate wooing. but an art merely an artifice 296 resolved dis-  
 solved 297 stole vestment. daffed doffed, put off 298 guards  
 defenses. civil decorous, grave 299 Appear I did appear  
 300 drops teardrops 302 subtle matter malleable material and cun-  
 ning 303 cautels crafty devices 305 takes and leaves uses one and  
 avoids the other 306 In either's aptness whichever is more appro-  
 priate 307 rank gross 309 That So that. level range and aim.  
 (Continues the metaphor of siege.) 310 hail i.e., of artillery  
 311 Showing . . . tame i.e., his aim being to represent his true nature  
 as loving and docile



And, veiled in them, did win whom he would maim. 312  
Against the thing he sought he would exclaim;  
When he most burnt in heart-wished luxury, 314  
He preached pure maid and praised cold chastity. 315

“Thus merely with the garment of a grace  
The naked and concealèd fiend he covered,  
That th’unexperient gave the tempter place,  
Which like a cherubin above them hovered. 319

312 And . . . maim and, disguised thus in kindness and docility, or in blushes, weeping, and paleness (lines 304–5), won the heart of the woman he intended to harm. 314 heart-wished luxury deeply desired lechery 315 pure maid as if he were an untouched virgin 316 with . . . grace with a charming outward show or appearance. (Perhaps suggesting also one of the three Graces.) 317 The naked . . . covered he covered his fiendish inner self 318 th’unexperient the inexperienced. place entry 319 Which . . . hovered who, resembling a cherub, hovered over his victims as though offering them protection.

Who, young and simple, would not be so loved? 320  
Ay me! I fell, and yet do question make 321  
What I should do again for such a sake. 322

“Oh, that infected moisture of his eye, 323  
Oh, that false fire which in his cheek so glowed,  
Oh, that forced thunder from his heart did fly, 325  
Oh, that sad breath his spongy lungs bestowed, 326  
Oh, all that borrowed motion seeming owed, 327  
Would yet again betray the fore-betrayed,  
And new pervert a reconcilèd maid!” 329

320 simple naive. be so loved surrender to a lover like him.  
321 question make i.e., ask myself 322 for such a sake for someone like him, or, for the sake of falling into such pleasure, however brief.  
323 infected infectious 325 forced feigned. from that from  
326 spongy lungs lungs that are spongelike (as all lungs are; perhaps with the suggestion of “blown up with flattery and pretended grief”)  
327 all . . . owed all that passion he seemed to possess himself but had, in fact, borrowed 329 reconcilèd penitent